

United Nations

Centre against Apartheid

Notes and Documents

4/90

February 1990

STATEMENTS BY NELSON MANDELA UPON HIS RELEASE ON 11, 12 AND 13 FEBRUARY 1990

[Note: This issue contains the text of the address by Mr. Nelson Mandela, made on 11 February 1990, the day of his release after more than 27 years in prison, at Grand Parade, Cape Town, as well as excerpts from the statements he made at the press conference held at Cape Town on 12 February 1990 and at the stadium outside Soweto on 13 February 1990.]

The views expressed are those of the author.]

All material in these Notes and Documents may be freely reprinted.

Acknowledgement, together with a copy of the publication containing the reprint, would be appreciated.

United Nations, New York 10017

90-10106

THE TEXT OF MR. NELSON MANDELA'S ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE
ON THE DAY OF HIS UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE AFTER TWENTY-
SEVEN YEARS IN PRISON, GRAND PARADE, CAPE TOWN
11 FEBRUARY 1990

Friends, comrades and fellow South Africans, I greet you in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all. I stand here before you, not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people.

Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands.

On this day of my release I extend my sincere and warmest gratitude to the millions of my compatriots and those in every corner of the globe who have campaigned tirelessly for my release.

I extend special greetings to the people of Cape Town, the city which has been my home for three decades. Your mass marches and other forms of struggle have served as a constant source of strength to all political prisoners.

I salute the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC). It has fulfilled our every expectation in its role as leader of the great march to freedom.

I salute our President, Comrade Oliver Tambo, for leading ANC even under the most difficult circumstances. I salute the rank-and-file members of ANC. You have sacrificed life and limb in the pursuit of the noble cause of our struggle.

I salute combatants of Umkhonto we Sizwe, like Solomon Mahlangu and Ashley Kriel, who have paid the ultimate price for the freedom of all South Africans.

I salute the South African Communist Party for its sterling contribution to the struggle for democracy. You have survived 40 years of unrelenting persecution. The memory of great communists like Moses Kotane, Yusuf Dadoo, Bram Fischer and Moses Mabhida will be cherished for generations to come. I salute General Secretary Joe Slovo - one of our finest patriots. We are heartened by the fact that the alliance between ourselves and the Party remains as strong as it always was. I salute the United Democratic Front (UDF), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO), the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses and the many other formations of the Mass Democratic Movement.

I also salute the Black Sash and the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). We note with pride that you have acted as the conscience of white South Africans. Even during the darkest days in the history of your struggle you held the flag of liberty high. The large-scale mass mobilization of the past few years is one of the key factors which led to the opening of the final chapter of our struggle.

I extend my greetings to the working class of our country. Your organized strength is the pride of our movement. You remain the most dependable force in the struggle to end exploitation and oppression.

I pay tribute to the many religious communities who carried the campaign for justice forward when the organizations of our people were silenced.

I greet the traditional leaders of our country. Many among you continue to walk in the footsteps of great heroes like Hintsa and Sekhukhuni.

I pay tribute to the endless heroism of the youth. You, the young lions, have energized our entire struggle.

I pay tribute to the mothers and wives and sisters of our nation. You are the rock-hard foundation of our struggle. Apartheid has inflicted more pain on you than on anyone else.

On this occasion, we thank the world community for their great contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle. Without your support our struggle would not have reached this advanced stage. The sacrifices of the front-line States will be remembered by South Africans forever.

My salutations will be incomplete without expressing my deep appreciation for the strength given to me during my long and lonely years in prison by my beloved wife and family. I am convinced that your pain and suffering was far greater than my own.

Before I go any further, I wish to make the point that I intend making only a few preliminary comments at this stage. I will make a more public statement only after I have had the opportunity to consult my comrades. Today the majority of South Africans, black and white, recognize that apartheid has no future. It has to be ended by our own decisive mass action in order to build peace and security. The mass campaign of defiance and other actions of our organization and people can only culminate with the establishment of democracy.

The apartheid destruction on our sub-continent is incalculable. The fabric of family life of millions of our people has been shattered. Millions are homeless and unemployed, our economy lies in ruins and our people are embroiled in political strife.

Our resort to the armed struggle in 1968, with the formation of the military wing of ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was a purely defensive action against the violence of apartheid.

The factors which necessitated the armed struggle still exist today. We have no option but to continue. We express the hope that a climate conducive to a negotiated settlement will be created soon so that there may no longer be the need for the armed struggle.

I am a loyal and disciplined member of ANC. I am therefore in full agreement with all of its objectives, strategies and tactics.

The need to unite the people of our country is as important a task now as it always has been. No individual leader is able to take on this enormous task on his own.

It is our task as leaders to place our views before our organization and to allow the democratic structures to decide on the way forward. On the

question of democratic practice, I feel duty-bound to make the point that a leader of the movement is a person who has been democratically elected at a national conference. This is a principle which must be upheld without any exceptions.

Today I wish to report to you that my talks with the Government have been aimed at normalizing the political situation in the country. We have not as yet begun discussing the basic demands of the struggle. I wish to stress that I, myself, have at no time entered into negotiation about the future of our country, except to insist on a meeting between ANC and the Government.

Mr. de Klerk has gone further than any other Nationalist president in taking some steps to normalize the situation.

However, there are further steps as outlined in the Harare Declaration that have to be met before negotiations on the basic demands of our people can begin.

I reiterate our call for, inter alia, the immediate ending of the state of emergency and the freeing of all, and not only some, political prisoners.

Only such a normalized situation, which allows for free political activity, can allow us to consult our people in order to obtain a mandate.

The people need to be consulted on who will negotiate and on the content of such negotiations. Negotiations cannot take place above the heads or behind the backs of our people.

It is our belief that the future of our country can only be determined by a body which is democratically elected on a non-racial basis.

Negotiations on the dismantling of apartheid will have to address the overwhelming demands of our people for a democratic, non-racial and unitary South Africa.

There must be an end to white monopoly on political power and a fundamental restructuring of our political and economic system to ensure that the inequalities of apartheid are addressed and our society thoroughly democratized.

It must be added that Mr. De Klerk himself is a man of integrity who is acutely aware of the danger of a public figure not honouring his undertakings.

But as an organization, we base our policy and strategies on the harsh reality we are faced with and this reality is that we are still suffering under the policy of the Nationalist Government. Our struggle has reached a decisive moment. We call on our people to seize this moment so that the process towards democracy is rapid and uninterrupted.

We have waited too long for our freedom. We can no longer wait. Now is the time to intensify the struggle on all fronts. To relax our effort now would be a mistake which generations to come will not be able to forgive.

The sight of freedom looming on the horizon should encourage us to redouble our efforts. It is only through disciplined mass action that our victory can be assured.

We call on our white compatriots to join us in the shaping of a new South Africa. The freedom movement is a political home for you too. We call on the international community to continue the campaign to isolate the apartheid régime.

To lift sanctions now would be to run the risk of aborting the process towards the complete eradication of apartheid. Our march to freedom is irreversible. We must not allow fear to stand in our way.

Universal suffrage on a common voters' roll in a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa is the only way to peace and racial harmony.

In conclusion, I wish to quote my own words during my trial in 1964. They are as true today as they were then. I quote:

"I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have carried the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunity. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

EXCERPTS FROM THE PRESS CONFERENCE BY MR. NELSON MANDELA,
HELD AT THE RESIDENCE OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CAPE TOWN
ON 12 FEBRUARY 1990

Question: ... Can you tell us how do you feel on your first morning as a free man?

Answer: ... I want to assure you that I am absolutely excited to be out. I am also excited to have the opportunity of addressing you, because throughout these difficult years in prison, the press, both local and foreign, have been a brick to us. I think it was originally the intention of the Government that we should be forgotten and that their leaders, leaders of the homelands, bantustans and all those who work within government structures should be built up. ... It was the press who never forgot us. We are therefore indebted to you and I am happy to be at this interview this morning.

Question: When President de Klerk announced your release on Saturday afternoon, he said that after two meetings with you he had come to the conclusion that you were committed to peace. Last night you committed yourself to the intensification of the armed struggle. Would you care to comment?

Answer: There is no conflict between those two statements. I have committed myself to the promotion of peace in the country, but I have done so as part and parcel of the decisions and campaigns which have been taken and launched by ANC. There is no conflict whatsoever.

There is not a single political organization in this country inside or outside Parliament which can even compare with ANC in its commitment to peace. The armed struggle is merely defensive. It is a defence act against the violence of apartheid, but we remain committed to peace.

...

Question: Could you tell us something about the meetings that you had with South African Cabinet ministers? Which Cabinet ministers did you meet and could you tell us something about the content of your discussions?

Answer: ... I have been having discussions with the Government over the last three years on two separate but related questions. The first one in which I had been negotiating with the Government was the release of my comrades, Mr. Sisulu and others.

As far as that is concerned, I have been negotiating. But the second issue has been one of a meeting between ANC and the Government. There I have been acting merely as a facilitator to bring these two major political organizations to the negotiating table.

...

I met a number of Cabinet ministers. The first, of course was Mr. Kobie Coetsee. I had countless meetings with him. The second has been Dr. Gerrit Viljoen whom I met now about four times since he took over his new portfolio.

As you know, I had met the former State President, Mr. P. W. Botha. That meeting has been misunderstood. There is a submission that this was a propaganda ploy on the part of the President at the time. It is not so. That meeting was requested by me and the former State President merely responded to my request for him to see me.

Secondly, it has been suggested that this was an attempt on the part of the former State President to do something that would embarrass Mr. de Klerk and that is not so. Minister de Klerk was involved right at the outset in the arrangements for this meeting. He was kept informed and he himself was in line with the fact that this discussion should take place.

Question: What is your view on sanctions? And do you intend to take up Mrs. Thatcher's invitation?

Answer: Everything that we set out to achieve through sanctions is still the same. Nothing has changed. You must remember that the demand in this country is for a non-racial society. We are very far from that, and it is too early for anybody to expect us to call for the lifting of sanctions.

But having said that, I would like to add that there is nothing that worries us as ANC and the fact that we should be involved in politics of confrontation and we will seize the earliest opportunity of settling our problems through peaceful means.

Question: You have spoken a couple of times this morning of your sensitivity to the concerns of the white population. Have you modified in any way your views on the redistribution of wealth?

Answer: No. My views are identical to those of ANC. The question of nationalization of the mines and similar sectors of the community is a fundamental policy of ANC and I believe that ANC is quite correct in this attitude and that we should support it.

...
Question: Can you describe your emotions as you came out of prison yesterday and also your first impressions of the South Africa you saw, particularly the rally and the violence?

Answer: I must confess that I am unable to describe my emotions. I was completely overwhelmed by the enthusiasm. It is something I did not expect. I would be merely rationalizing if I told you that I am able to describe my own feelings. It was breathtaking, that is all I can say.

Question: And your first impressions of the South Africa that you found?

Answer: Well, it is a totally different South Africa. Along the route I was surprised to see the number of whites who seemed to identify themselves with what is happening in the country amongst blacks. I was absolutely surprised. I expected that response from blacks, but the number of whites who seemed to feel that a change is absolutely imperative surprised me.

...
EXCERPTS FROM THE ADDRESS BY MR. NELSON MANDELA
AT THE RALLY THAT TOOK PLACE UPON HIS RETURN TO SOWETO
ON 13 FEBRUARY 1990

...
The crisis in education that exists in South Africa demands special attention. The education crisis in black schools is a political crisis. It also arises out of the fact that our people have no vote and therefore cannot make the Government of the day responsive to their needs.

Apartheid education is inferior and a crime against humanity. Education is an area that needs attention, that needs the attention of all our people; students, parents, teachers, workers and all of the organized sectors of our community.

...
It has been the policy of ANC that the entire education system is a site of struggle. ... I want to add my voice therefore to the call made at the beginning of the year: that all students must return to school and learn.

We must continue our struggle for people's education within the school system and utilize its resources to achieve our goals. I call on the Government to build more schools, to train and employ more teachers, and to abandon its policies of forcing our children out of the school system by use of various measures.

...
As I said when I stood on the dock at the Rivonia Trial 27 years ago and as I said on the day of my release in Cape Town, ANC will pursue the armed struggle against the Government as long as the violence of apartheid continues.

Our armed combatants act under the political leadership of ANC, cadres of our people's army are engaged not only in military affairs but as the political commissars of our movement. We are therefore disturbed that there are certain elements amongst those who claim to support the liberation struggle who use violence against our people. The hijacking and setting alight of vehicles and the harassment of innocent people are criminal acts that have no place in our struggle. We condemn that.

...

Our major weapon of struggle against apartheid oppression ... is our people organized into mass formation of the democratic movement. This is achieved by politically organizing our people, not through the use of violence against our people.

I call in the strongest possible way for us to act with the dignity and discipline that our just struggle for freedom deserves. Our vigils must be celebrated in peace and joy. In particular, I call on our people in Natal to unite against the perpetrators of violence. ... Let us act with political foresight and develop bold steps to end the mindless violence. ... We understand that attempts have been made to disrupt the unity of the oppressed by starting tensions between African and Indian communities in Natal. Let us build from the proud tradition of unity in action.

...

We call on the police to abandon apartheid, to serve the interests of the people. Join our march to a new South Africa where you also have a place. We note with appreciation that there are certain areas where policemen are acting with restraint and fulfilling the real role of protecting all our people, irrespective of their race.

Much debate has been spoken of ANC policies on the economy relating to nationalization and the redistribution of wealth. We believe that apartheid has created a heinous system of exploitation in which a racist white minority monopolizes economic wealth while the vast majority of the oppressed and black people are condemned to poverty.

South Africa is a wealthy country. It is the labour of black workers that has built the cities, roads and factories we see. They cannot be excluded from sharing this wealth. ANC is just as committed to economic growth and productivity as the present employer came to be. Yet we are also committed to ensure that a democratic government has the resources to address the inequalities caused by apartheid. Our people need proper houses, not ghettos like Soweto.

...

Workers need a living wage and the right to join unions of their own choice and to participate in determining policies that affect their lives.

...

We call on employers to recognize the fundamental rights of workers in our country. We are marching to a new future based on strong foundations of

respect for each other achieved through bona fide negotiations. In particular, we call for genuine negotiations to achieve a fair Labour Relations Act and mechanisms to resolve conflict.

The fears of whites about their rights and place in a South Africa they do not control exclusively are an obstacle we must understand and address. I stated in 1964 that I and ANC are as opposed to black domination as we are to white domination. We must accept that our statements and declarations alone will not be sufficient to allay the fears of white South Africans. We must clearly demonstrate our good will to our white compatriots and convince them by our conduct ... that a South Africa without apartheid will be a better home for all.

...

We call on those who out of ignorance have collaborated with apartheid in the past to join our liberation struggle. No men or women who have abandoned apartheid will be excluded from our movement towards a non-racial, united and democratic South Africa based on one person-one vote, on a common voters' roll.

...

Courtesy of Notes and Documents

